



Segregation: New studies show Philly has nation's most separate and unequal schools, neighborhoods. Chicago, New York, Cleveland, Detroit close behind.

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Two new studies show that the Philadelphia region is one of the most separate and unequal when it comes to neighborhoods and schools for blacks, whites, Hispanics and Asians. You can download them [here](#).

The studies' author, Brown University sociologist John Logan, broke it down for *City Paper*:

“Philadelphia's black population, and particularly its affluent black population, lives in much poorer neighborhoods than comparable whites because they are so highly segregated by race. In the greater Philadelphia area that includes Wilmington and Camden, even the most affluent black households are in neighborhoods that are close to majority black and very few such neighborhoods are predominantly middle class. The overall level of segregation has changed very little since 1980. In these ways Philadelphia is like a number of older and larger metro areas in the Northeast and Midwest where the historical legacy of segregation in central cities from before the Civil Rights era seems to be locked into place and continues to be reproduced even as minorities begin to move to the suburbs.”

Philadelphia blacks are exposed to poverty at a rate nearly three times higher than whites (demography wonks: we're talking Metropolitan Division, not Metropolitan Statistical Area)--the third highest rate in the country after Newark and Milwaukee. The average black person in the Philly area lives in a neighborhood with a 24.8% poverty rate, compared to just 8.4% for whites. Chicago, Cleveland, St. Louis and Detroit follow close behind.

And Philly has by far the most extreme gap between Hispanic and white exposure to poverty. Hispanics are more than three times more likely to live in impoverished communities, living in neighborhoods with an average poverty rate of 25.4%. And we have the second highest ratio of Asian to white exposure to poverty: Asians are nearly twice as exposed, and live in neighborhoods with a 13.4% poverty rate.

(If you're mildly obsessed with the data behind this kind of thing, check out the stats for Philadelphia's MD and MSA.)

And the schools. The Philadelphia area has the largest performance gap between black and white schools nation-wide, as measured by elementary school reading scores. The average black kid attends a school that scores in the 21st percentile, while the average white kid's school scores in the 66th.

“Philadelphia is the extreme case, where the average white student is in a school where students perform at the 66th percentile, and black students are in schools below the 21st percentile. The white-black ratio is over three to one,” writes Logan. “Other metros at the top of this list include Chicago, Newark, Buffalo, Milwaukee, Cleveland, New York, and Pittsburgh.”

Same goes for Hispanics and whites: we're number one, with Hispanics attending schools that are 3.28 times worse than those that whites attend. The average Hispanic attends a school that scores in the 20th percentile on reading tests.

Nation-wide, the average black student attended an elementary school that scored at the 35th percentile on state tests with Hispanics and Native Americans not far behind, while Asians and whites were at schools scoring around the 60th percentile.

This is a big deal, as Logan points out, because this “is the first national-level study at all grade levels to look beyond the racial segregation of schools to the question of inequalities in student performance of schools attended by children of different race and ethnicity.”

In 2011, we apparently still need to be reminded that separate means unequal. Where you live has a big impact on where you go to school: going to school in North Philly (you're probably black) and the Main Line (likely white) are two very different things.

Crucially, Logan found that the free market sorting poor people into poor neighborhoods and rich into rich (as if this alone would be morally acceptable) couldn't account for the racial segregation. Which leaves, well, race.

“The average affluent black or Hispanic household lives in a poorer neighborhood than the average lower-income white resident,” writes Logan. Indeed, the average black or Hispanic household making more than \$75,000 per year lives in a poorer neighborhood than the average white household making less than \$40,000

Interestingly, Logan was only able to use data from 2004, because the Department of Education “has yet to make public more current information.” The Bush and Obama Administrations' failure to produce this information is particularly striking because Logan's findings indicate that “attacking this pattern by focusing on a few low-achieving schools,” which is the modus operandi of No Child Left Behind, “can have only marginal results.” The problem is segregation and cannot be solved by pathologizing non-white schools and the people (say, teachers) who work there.

Indeed, as Logan notes, “it is hard to imagine how the disadvantages in schools attended by black and Hispanic children can be redressed unless there are major changes in the segregation of schools by race and class. And the issue of segregation is not on the policy agenda.”

We may have a black president, but segregation and racial inequality continue to define our nation’s geography. Most disturbingly, a new Pew study found that the recession wiped out recent wealth gains for blacks and Latinos: black household wealth fell by 55% and Hispanics lost 66%, while whites lost just 16%. The average white now has a net worth twenty times larger than blacks and 18 times larger than Hispanics--the largest racial wealth gap in at least a quarter century.

As Logan writes, “In its analysis of the sources of urban riots in the mid-1960s, the National Commission on Civil Disorders observed that the country was dividing into two nations, increasingly separate and unequal. Now – more than four decades later and in a very different social and political climate – new census data remind us that divisions remain very deep.”

Philadelphia, suburbanites and particularly all of you who are mindlessly obsessed with the deficit: segregation and inequality are a national disgrace.